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## Employee Relations

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# The many approaches to organisational misbehaviour

## A review, map and research agenda

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Approaches  
to organisational  
misbehaviour

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to re-map the neglected phenomenon of organisational misbehaviour (misbehaviour) by reflecting the many approaches taken on this emergent field of study, and articulate a revised research agenda.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Both preceding and recent empirical and theoretical research papers are discussed and possible overlap and convergence of findings are examined. The discussions mainly surround studies from industrial sociology and organisational behaviour, yet studies from industrial relations and gender studies are also considered. From the re-assessment, a revised map and research agenda for misbehaviour is produced.

**Findings** – More research should be directed towards humour and its uses in contemporary organisations, why managers break the rules, the internet as a tool and framework for defiant activities, informal and hidden employee identities as a framework for self-organised misbehaviour, functional misbehaviour and informal strategies used by employees to survive work. Further work is required to unify the field and suggestions are made on how this may be achieved.

**Research limitations/implications** – The paper is based on a re-assessment of the extant literature and the findings reflect the broadly problematic matter of reconciling incongruous paradigms.

**Practical implications** – The paper puts forward a revised and updated map of organisational misbehaviour. It also offers insights which managers can use to deal with a broad range of misbehaviour conducted within and outwith the workplace.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides a new map that goes beyond previous articulations of misbehaviour. The revised research agenda attempts to guide future research on the subject of misbehaviour in a more balanced direction.

**Keywords** Organisational behaviour, Research

**Paper type** Literature review

### Introduction

Organisational misbehaviour (misbehaviour) has been a prominent feature of organisational studies throughout the twentieth century and continues to command similar attention in the first decade of the twenty-first century. For instance, from systematic soldiering identified by Taylor (1917/1967) at the beginning of the twentieth century, to quota restriction in the 1940s (Roy, 1952), to workplace fiddles and theft in



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the 1970s (Mars, 1994; Ditton, 1977), to employees resisting new forms of human resource management (HRM) in the 1990s (McKinlay and Taylor, 1996a, b), and more recently, with a range of studies conducted in the first few years of the twenty-first century that focus on employee misappropriation of the organisation's internet capabilities (Block, 2001; Lim, 2002; Griffiths, 2003; Lara *et al.*, 2006).

More recently, misbehaviour has been the specific focus point of a range of scholarly debates that concern the tightening of management control over the labour process and job satisfaction under quality management regimes (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005), and debates in many management circles about whether misbehaviour should be a more prominent feature of models, research and practical advice that emphasises the creation of positive behaviour (Sagie *et al.*, 2003; Vardi and Weitz, 2004; Kidwell and Martin, 2005). If there is one thing that is certain about misbehaviour is that, however, the labour process has changed and continues to change throughout industrialisation, and however, much management theorists advise on the curbing of misbehaviour, misbehaviour is a lasting feature of organisations. However, misbehaviour may well be a lasting feature of organisations, yet as the brief examples given above suggest, misbehaviour continues to develop according to the nature of modern organisations, the people who work within them, and to an extent reflects broader social, political and technological trends.

It is the view that misbehaviour has a range of pervasive core features, yet continues to develop as an organisational phenomenon due to a range of contemporary internal and external forces, which provides the main driving force behind this paper. Moreover, as what is currently known about misbehaviour is spread across incongruous fields of interest, there is genuine purpose and value in attempting to reconcile such diverging insights. Consequently, the main objective of the paper is to re-visit and re-review extant literature on misbehaviour with view to re-mapping current understandings. A further key objective is to propose a revised research agenda for future research on misbehaviour.

To meet the objectives, the paper is organised into four sections. First of all definitions of misbehaviour, the rich variety of misbehaviour, and why misbehaviour has become an emerging feature of contemporary organisational study, is discussed. This forms a broad overview of a recently revitalised, yet previously long-neglected field of interest. The aim of the second section is to summarise and map out the main themes of misbehaviour. Noted first of all in this section are studies that consider continuity in misbehaviour. Following on is a discussion of what are taken to be emergent themes in the inter-disciplinary field of misbehaviour. The third section discusses problems with the extant research as a basis for informing future research on misbehaviour. The fourth section is a summary and conclusion of the main points of the paper and sets out a revised agenda for future research on misbehaviour.

### **Organisational misbehaviour: what is it and why has it recently become an emerging feature of organisational study?**

#### *Defining misbehaviour*

It is only with recent additions to the literature on "organisational misbehaviour" that a range of definitions has been provided. For instance, key writers from industrial sociology – Ackroyd and Thompson (1999, p. 2) – advise misbehaviour to be "anything you do at work you are not supposed to do" a term used earlier by Sprouse

(1992) to describe sabotage in the American workplace. Further, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999, p. 25) believe misbehaviour to concern employee-employer contestation over matters related to time, work, product and identity. Watson (2003, p. 230), moreover, provides a longer and more detailed definition:

[A]ctivities occurring within the workplace that (a) according to official structure, culture and rules of the organisation, “should not happen” and (b) contain an element of challenge to the dominant modes of operating or to dominant interests in the organisation.

Watson’s definition echoes the ideas of the previous definition in that the main focus of attention is what should not go on in organisations. Added to that is a dimension of employee non-cooperation that falls short of organised resistance, and includes acts such as silent strikes and protests (McKinlay and Taylor, 1996b; Graham, 1995), or using humour to undermine management in a non-unionised call centre (Taylor and Bain, 2003). Watson’s take is reflected in the ideas of Thompson and Newsome (2004) who liken misbehaviour to anything other than organised and collective action by labour as a wider class agent. Importantly, Collinson and Ackroyd (2005) point out that the field of misbehaviour is still not unified. They believe misbehaviour fits in between resistance – overt, principled, and perhaps formally organised – and dissent, which is equated with linguistic or normative disagreement. Collinson and Ackroyd (2005, p. 306), moreover, view misbehaviour as “self-conscious rule-breaking”. More recently, Spicer and Bohm (2007, p. 1677) suppose misbehaviour to be infra-political strategies that make use of “informal structures of kinship or friendship, eschewing movement professionals, and seeks to resist through ‘direct action’”. Of further significance is how Spicer and Bohm believe such struggles commonly take place away from the shop floor, a sentiment also supported by Collinson and Ackroyd (2005).

Unlike in the case of industrial sociology, where misbehaviour is often presented as micro and informal class-like struggles, and is celebrated somewhat, in the field of organisational behaviour, misbehaviour is typically depicted as a negative or destructive phenomenon. Take the work of Vardi and Wiener (1996), for example, who are acknowledged to be the first to invent the term “organisational misbehaviour”. They put forward the view that misbehaviour is:

[...] any intentional action by member/s of organisation/s that defies and violates (a) shared organisational norms and expectations, and/or (b) core societal values, mores and standards of proper conduct (Vardi and Wiener, 1996, p. 153).

Such acts are made out to concern the intent to benefit the self or the organisation, and inflict damage on the organisation. Vardi, the lead author, remains loyal to this definition in later and more substantial work on misbehaviour (Vardi and Weitz, 2004). A further definition provided by scholars from the field of organisational behaviour propose misbehaviour to be “the kind of organisational behaviour that can be expected when normative work values are not a deciding factor” (Sagie *et al.*, 2003, p. 1). Broader work from the field of organisational behaviour contains unequivocal reference to misbehaviour, yet such actions are termed slightly differently. For instance, voluntary behaviour that breaks significant organisational norms (Robinson and Bennett, 1995), actions that are intended to bring harm to the organisation (Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997), intentional behaviour that is viewed by the organisation as contrary to its legitimate interests (Sackett, 2002), and, actions by employees that have negative consequences for an individual, a group, or the organisation itself (Griffin *et al.*, 1998).

Overall, the overwhelming consensus from the field of organisational behaviour appears to confirm the view that misbehaviour, as is the case in the field of industrial sociology, is pervasive across and at all levels of organisations. However, comparisons between the two fields of interest end here, as misbehaviour is commonly associated with the deliberate errant actions of the organisation's employees. Despite this widely held view point, recent work indicates that organisational behaviour theorists are starting to view misbehaviour differently, and several theorists have questioned the negative connotations associated with acts that infringe upon expected organisational norms and values. Indeed, it is the case that a growing number of theorists (Galperin, 2003; Vardi and Weitz, 2004; Kidwell and Martin, 2005) believe certain acts of misbehaviour should be viewed as ethical, proper, and ultimately deliver effective outcomes for organisations.

#### *The rich variety of misbehaviour*

Exploring the rich variety of misbehaviour is discussed in relation to the four main scholarly fields that make explicit or synonymous reference to it. Fields of interest include industrial sociology, organisational misbehaviour, industrial relations and gender studies. Each field of interest is referred in this sub-section as a genre, or a general category of composition. Such an approach is taken because some acts of misbehaviour are exclusive to one of these four fields of interest and some overlap between two or more. For example, employee sabotage is of particular interest to all fields bar gender studies.

*Industrial sociology and misbehaviour.* The field of industrial sociology is characterised by a long historical reference to misbehaviour. Broadly, the field of industrial sociology explores the rich and varied interactions between workers and management. Classical work, however, tends to closely follow major themes of industrial relations, such as how and why employees restrict their output (Roy, 1952; Burawoy, 1979), or sabotage industrial processes (Brown, 1977, Taylor and Walton, 1979). Further dimensions of misbehaviour explored by industrial sociologists include the study of workplace fiddles and pilferage (Ditton, 1977; Mars, 1994; Webb and Palmer, 1998). Workplace fiddles, moreover, have also been explored in terms of working on "homers" or performing domestic chores on company time (Anteby, 2003). Further contemporary themes of industrial sociology tend to reflect the changing nature of work and in particular how new forms of management control as well as the marginalisation of organised labour, has led to changes in misbehaviour. For instance, such practices are believed to create the conditions for employees to pursue survival strategies (Noon and Blyton, 2007), such as clowning (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), cynicism towards management (Taylor and Bain, 2003), distancing (Collinson, 1994, Delbridge, 1995), or gossiping as a means to gain some degree of control over the labour process (Noon and Delbridge, 1993).

*Organisational behaviour and misbehaviour.* Many acts of misbehaviour uncovered and explored in the field of organisational behaviour have remarkable similarities with the misbehaviour uncovered in the field of industrial sociology. However, in the field of organisational behaviour, such acts are commonly viewed as the "dark side of organisations" (Griffin and O'Leary-Kelly, 2004) or about violating organisational norms (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Similarities with industrial sociology includes reference to acts that include withholding effort, or social loafing (Amichai-Hamburger, 2003), ripping



off customers (Hawkins, 1984), dishonest acts in the workplace (Coyne and Bartram, 2000). Such acts, however, seem to be explored from an individualistic angle rather than taken to be a product of asymmetrical employment relations. Further acts that are similar to those researched in the field of industrial sociology include survival strategies, such as drug use as a means to survive the monotony and domineering nature of work (Mangione and Quinn, 1975). However, the field of organisational behaviour also contributes unique insights to the emerging field of misbehaviour. For instance, investigating and theorising how and why employees seek to cover-up mistakes (Stashevsky and Weisberg, 2003) and why employees are aggressive to each other (Dupre and Barling, 2003; Martinko *et al.*, 2005). The richness of misbehaviour is further demonstrated with research that assesses the impact of organisational romances on organisational performance (Quinn, 1977).

*Industrial relations and misbehaviour.* Historical industrial relations studies seem to indicate that the labour movement formed around acts such as misbehaviour. For instance, Hobsbawm's (1968) account of organised machine breaking by Luddites in the early nineteenth century demonstrates how the working class expressed hostility to the machines of the industrial revolution. Similarly, early twentieth century labour movement writers often referred, or indeed encouraged, workers to withdraw their efficiency (Flynn, 1916). More recently, the field of industrial relations continues to omit direct references to the term misbehaviour. However, acts that are synonymous with misbehaviour are widely discussed, and terms applied in this field make reference to lesser versions of strike action or action short of strike action (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004), unorganised conflict (Hyman, 1981), alternative forms of conflict (Edwards and Scullion, 1982), additive forms of expression (Bean, 1975) and unconventional practices (Analoui, 1995). Further synonymous and incisive references to misbehaviour in the field of industrial relations includes sabotage, or subterranean bargaining, said to represent a gap left in the collective bargaining process (Zabala, 1989). However, some misbehaviour referred to in this field is noted by co-operative practices. A good example is the case of "indulgency patterns" noted by Gouldner (1965), who refers to a range of informal concessions by management that are designed with the express interest of making employees look upon organisational prerogatives more favourably.

*Gender studies and misbehaviour.* In the field of gender studies what can be defined as misbehaviour deviates somewhat from what has been discussed so far. Indeed, it would be fair to say misbehaviour defined by gender consists of a broad range of misbehaviour that cannot easily be related to the nature of work organisations (Thompson and Newsome, 2004). Where it can be related to work organisations it is closely associated with masculinity being the dominant gender in such situations. This can take several forms, such as troublesome industrial relations disputes concerning demarcation and overtime, that result in men displaying ill-feelings towards women (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976). Misbehaviour can also occur when women break into jobs that have historically been the preserve of men. In such situations women often find themselves unfairly undermined by men who use the gender-related connotations of business talk to question the competence of their female colleagues (Levin, 2001). Similarly, Salzinger's (2000) study of a Maquiladora shop floor highlights how some sexual misbehaviour can be part and parcel of the labour process in that sexual objectification is deeply woven in the relationship between male supervisors and female operatives. Where it is less related to the nature of work organisations, it often takes the form of what Gutek (1989, p. 59) refers to as the "carry-over of gender-based

expectations into the workplace” typically involving men treating women as sex objects, or expecting women to be passive subjects of men, on work time. Despite widespread poor treatment by men, not all women believe the labour process should be de-sexualised and evidence of mutual sexuality being explored in the workplace, or women being the sole instigators of sexual actions in work organisations, is reasonably well documented in the field of gender studies (Pollert, 1981; Collinson and Collinson, 1989; DiTomaso, 1989; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

*Misbehaviour: a field emerging out of scholarly neglect*

The recent interest in misbehaviour is an emerging one, stimulated simultaneously, though largely separately, by debates in around the labour process (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Delbridge, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) and mainstream organisational behaviour (Vardi and Wiener, 1996; Vardi and Weitz, 2004). How and why this began will now be briefly re-visited and reviewed.

In the case of industrial sociology, Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) and Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) were probably the first in recent years to revisit and review the phenomenon of misbehaviour. Their interest in misbehaviour is believed to have been stimulated by claims made about new management initiatives, in that labour has been removed as an active agency of resistance in a considerable portion of such theory and research. In more detail, Thompson and Ackroyd believe the most recent crop of research and theory overstates the effects and effectiveness of new management practices as a means to control misbehaviour. As such, contemporary management practices, such as HRM and total quality management (TQM), do not necessarily lead to an increase in compliant employees. Instead, however, they believe three particular forces conspire to make it seem as if misbehaviour is in decline, becoming a thing of the past, and therefore irrelevant in current debates.

The first problem identified by Thompson and Ackroyd relates to the changing social, political and industrial context since the late 1970s. This includes the fracturing of collectivism – noted acutely in the British Workplace Industrial/Employee/Employment Relations Series (Cully *et al.*, 1999; Millward *et al.*, 2000; Kersley *et al.*, 2006) and how employees have been denied access to traditional sources of collective power because of political action. As a consequence of such change, it is often assumed that the decline of trade union memberships is synonymous with an acceptance of managerial agendas.

Moreover, Thompson and Ackroyd believe many organisational theorists understate the alienating tendencies and over-estimate how effective new management initiatives such as TQM are at controlling and satisfying employees. In effect, such contemporary organisational theory has implied that the “spaces” for employees to misbehave have declined. The basis of the counter-claim is that the shadow of control-orientated scientific management continues to cast a shadow over “employee friendly” management practices such as HRM and TQM (Smith and Thompson, 1998), said to represent a major departure from alienating Fordist techniques (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Wickens, 1987; Womack *et al.*, 1990). The rhetoric of these management techniques points to more humanistic work practices that are aimed at minimising waste, involving staff in low-level decision-making and creating an inclusive organisational culture. Coupled to less bureaucratic organisational hierarchies and more humanistic ways of managing labour relations are new ways for management to secure data that can be used



to control the labour process. For instance, while small groups of employees are commonly delegated responsibilities – once the work of supervisors or line managers – electronic technologies are used to monitor the effectiveness of teams. As a consequence, if we believe the rhetoric of HRM and TQM, in that employees have less reason and space to misbehave, then it is unlikely researchers will go looking for it, never mind see it as important factor in organisational research.

Finally, Thompson and Ackroyd believe the neglect of misbehaviour relates to how descriptions of new management practices rely heavily on Foucauldian conceptual props. This is with particular reference to one of main tenets of Foucauldian labour process theory – that of the panopticon and how the observed can be seen but cannot see, while the observers see everything but cannot be seen – and how contemporary monitoring and surveillance devices commonly used by management are alleged to result in docile and useful bodies (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992a, b; Sewell, 1998). The result is that misbehaviour disappears from the theoretical equation because two particular (problematic) assumptions are made about management. The first is that management is able to monopolise knowledge of the labour process and the second is that the aim of management control is to create obedient bodies rather than willing subjects. Taken together, the main assumption made about relating electronic surveillance to the idea of a panopticon is that misbehaviour is likely to become less prevalent where electronic surveillance is used effectively. As a consequence of this assumption, misbehaviour has become a marginal feature of both Foucauldian and broader debates on the labour process.

The neglect of misbehaviour has also raised further commentary from industrial sociologists. Indeed, Collinson and Ackroyd (2005) relate the neglect of misbehaviour to the arbitrary limits of scholarly disciplines. In other words, it could be said that there cannot be an emerging field of misbehaviour until it is widely accepted that there should be no excessive focus on, for example, restriction of output, fiddles and pilferage, irony and satire, or, men treating women poorly in the workplace. Spicer and Bohm (2007), moreover, echo the works of Thompson and Ackroyd (1995), but present their argument in a slightly different manner. They imply misbehaviour is becoming more important as a dimension of organisational study because we live in a world “where there is little space for public and formalised contestation” (Spicer and Bohm, 2007, p. 1676).

From the mid-1990s, the phenomenon of misbehaviour also became a popular subject for scholarly debate in the field of organisational behaviour (Robinson and Bennett, 1995; Vardi and Wiener, 1996; Sagie *et al.*, 2003; Vardi and Weitz, 2004; Kidwell and Martin, 2005). Vardi and Weitz (2004), for example, attribute the neglect of misbehaviour to the nature of organisational behaviour as an academic discipline. Broadly, it is believed that, in historical terms, the field of organisational behaviour has an institutional bias towards the conventional side of organisations. Where misbehaviour is given attention it tends to be at the cost of unconventional practices to businesses. Further reasons for the neglect can be found in the work of the key organisational behaviour writers from this perspective. As such, the works of Vardi and Weitz (2004), Vardi and Wiener (1996) Sagie *et al.* (2003) and Kidwell and Martin (2005) point to three further reasons why the field of organisational behaviour has neglected misbehaviour.

First, it has been suggested that organisational behaviour researchers and theorists neglect misbehaviour because top management generally has no interest in studying misbehaviour and even less interested in making any findings public (Vardi and Weitz, 2004). It is believed that this approach relates back to the origins of management theory and how attentions ever since have been focused on increasing production and motivation. As a consequence, the ever-demanding habits of management have created a healthy demand for practitioners, consultants and academics to resolve their problems. Crucially, the manner in which this occurred has led to a massive array of models, research and practical advice that emphasises the creation of positive behaviour and omits a vast range of organisational activity that could be considered misbehaviour.

The second reason for the neglect of misbehaviour relates to the methodological limitations of a great deal of organisational behaviour research and theory. For instance, as Vardi and Weitz point out quite explicitly, organisational behaviour tends to focus on a rather small number of organisational phenomena. What is more, the problems associated with studying certain ring-fenced aspects of organisations are compounded by the research methods typically used in organisational behaviour – that is, quantitative, precise, and rigorous language to describe ambiguous organisational phenomena. The outcome is that organisational behaviour researchers and theorists do not effectively conceptualise irregular and often obscure dimensions of everyday organisational life. In other words, the field of organisational behaviour is neglectful of misbehaviour because there is a general belief that it has no part to play in organisational success (however, success may be defined) and is off the organisational behaviour “radar”.

A third explanation put forward to explain why organisational behaviour theorists have recently revisited misbehaviour is based on the impression that misbehaviour proliferates in the modern work organisation and that contemporary misbehaviour extends from minor employee aberrations all the way up to serious management misbehaviour, such as the high-profile scandal with Enron in 2002 (Sagie *et al.*, 2003; Kidwell and Martin, 2005). As such, misbehaviour is considered to be one of the most serious internal problems that organisations face. Consequently, it seems safe to assume that a major incentive to revisit misbehaviour, as is the case put forward by industrial sociologists (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), concerns the profound difficulties managers have with managing employees under HRM and TQM and within the “new economy”.

### **Towards a re-mapping of misbehaviour: reviewing continuity and change in misbehaviour**

To create a new map of misbehaviour requires an understanding of misbehaviour that continues to be a feature of organisational study. To be fully updated, and ultimately of use for future research purposes, it also requires an understanding of emergent studies of misbehaviour that focus on new or neglected forms of misbehaviour. Previous maps of misbehaviour have been produced, such as Ackroyd and Thompson’s (1999, p. 25) “Dimensions of misbehaviour”. Ackroyd and Thompson’s map has been widely reproduced, remains valid in terms of presenting a continuum of acts surrounding four contested areas between employee and employer, yet it is proposed that it requires updating to proportionately reflect misbehaviour from other disciplines, such as organisational behaviour, industrial relations and gender studies, as well as acknowledging emergent studies of misbehaviour not covered by their findings.

Moreover, typologies put forward by organisational behavioural theorists, such as Vardi and Wiener (1996) and Vardi and Weitz (2004), also remain valid in terms of relating misbehaviour to the motives of individuals, yet a key disadvantage of organisational behaviour typologies concerns the acts being articulated in a manner that is biased towards managerialist academics and practitioners. In brief, a fresh map of misbehaviour is required to account for the biases and omissions from competing fields of interest and misbehaviour.

#### *Core features of misbehaviour*

*Micro-resistance and sabotage.* As previously noted, misbehaviour has a long history and can be traced back, at the very least, to acts that involve machine breaking during early days of the industrial revolution (Hobsbawm, 1968). Sabotage, and other acts of informal resistance, moreover, commonly blighted the introduction of early forms of scientific management (Brown, 1977). Indeed, many workers who were not unionised often resorted to systematic soldiering (Taylor, 1917/1967) or openly or discreetly exercised the innate human capacity to frustrate the labour process (Flynn, 1916). Fifty or more years later employee recalcitrance emerged as a popular theme in post-war studies (Roy, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1958). Scientific management had clearly changed in that time – due to innovations from management and pressure from trade unions – and the focus of attention moved to understanding the inefficiencies of piece-rate systems. Explanations were sought, for example, for individual and group-related quota restriction, making out, and informal job satisfaction. Further studies that represent the post-war years reflected on informal actions taken by management to command greater commitment from labour (Gouldner, 1954) and to avert the threat of wildcat industrial action (Gouldner, 1965). Equivalent British studies of the time (Baldamus, 1961; Lupton, 1963; Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968) also contain detailed accounts of informal practices and employee discontent. The economically and politically turbulent years that followed were characterised by significant reference to informal industrial protest and acts of sabotage (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976; Taylor and Walton, 1979; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Beynon, 1984; Thompson and Bannon, 1985). However, the arrival of a series of neo-conservative governments and the subsequent decline of trade unions did not herald an end to employee resistance, even if strike activity declined significantly in this period (Hale, 2007). Indeed, the decades that include and followed demonstrate how micro-resistance and employee sabotage continues to be a common feature of the increasingly common non-union organisation (Graham, 1995; McKinlay and Taylor, 1996a, b; Bain and Taylor, 2000; Taylor and Bain, 2003; Mulholland, 2004; Townsend, 2005; Barnes, 2007). As such, micro-resistance and sabotage should unquestionably be seen as a core feature of misbehaviour.

*Fiddles, pilferage and crime.* Possibly, the second most widely discussed form of misbehaviour concerns acts such as fiddles and pilferage (Mars, 1994; Ditton, 1977). This is despite the fact that the fields of industrial sociology and organisational behaviour largely ignored such activity up until the late 1960s and early 1970s. Industrial sociologists are believed to have taken an interest as it became clearer over time how theft and pilferage is integral to the standard functioning of organisations (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), and perhaps has a place, as is the case with similarly unofficial acts, such as defiant forms of lateness, absenteeism and turnover, in the effort bargain (Edwards, 1986). For example, Ditton's (1977) work identified a link

between the fiddle, piece-rate systems and making out. Mars (1994), moreover, concentrated on making a connection between formal, informal and illegal reward systems. Despite theorists such as Mars and Ditton producing broad and long-lasting theories for us to understand organisational-based fiddles, such activity continues to be noted in a range of similar research (Analoui and Kakabadse, 1989; Webb and Palmer, 1998; Knights and McCabe, 2000).

In the field of organisational behaviour, where such activity is commonly categorised as “occupational crime” (Coleman, 1994), employee fiddles and similar activities, were believed to the responsibility of other scholarly disciplines, such as criminology or organisational anthropology (Vardi and Weitz, 2004). Since, then the field of organisational behaviour has made this phenomenon a priority due to its prevalence in organisations, its costly impact, and how managing organisational crime is a daunting challenge for management (Tomlinson and Greenberg, 2005). However, in the field of organisational behaviour, occupational crime is approached from a variety of perspectives. Examples include the unauthorised taking of organisational property (Hollinger and Clark, 1983), employing people with dishonest attitudes (Jones and Terris, 1983), motivations to steal (Greenberg, 1993), and, fraud (Bologna and Shaw, 2000). In total, whatever angle is taken, it is clear to see how fiddles, pilferage and theft, are also a pervasive feature of organisations.

*Gender and sexuality.* The third and final dimension, which appears to be at an enduring feature of misbehaviour, concerns gender and sexuality. That is, the gendered nature of workplace power relations (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005), and sexual misconduct (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Gender and sexuality, moreover, are a relatively recent addition to organisational study. Indeed, Cockburn (1991) believes gender became a missing feature of organisational study because organisations were traditionally theorised and studied along the lines of formal hierarchies and official practices. Likewise, sexuality is overlooked in decades of organisational research because it was believed to be part of a private realm (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). As a consequence of a long historical fixation with the formal and official, gender and sexuality only became a prominent feature of organisational study from the 1970s onwards. However, since this time, both gender and sexuality, in an organisational context, has proven to be a popular and developing field of interest. In line with the different approaches that are apparent in the fields of industrial sociology and organisational behaviour, are two distinct approaches to gender and sexual misbehaviour. For instance, in the case of gender-related misbehaviour, links are made between gender itself and hidden parts of the labour process. A re-occurring example involves the many ways by which men respond to females in the workplace and particularly involves men objecting to women taking over what they believe is their territory (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976; Pollert, 1981; Cavendish, 1982; Westwood, 1984; Cockburn, 1991; Levin, 2001).

From an organisational behaviour perspective, gender and sexuality continue to be viewed as personal issues that conflict with organisational objectives, and a clear distinction is made between sexual harassment and consensual sexual relationships (Cleveland *et al.*, 2000). As such, similar misbehaviour is understood in the field of organisational behaviour to be a deviant way in which a male may elect to achieve an organisational goal; the results being an act that defies organisational and societal codes of proper conduct (Vardi and Weitz, 2004), or an act that goes against the de-sexualisation of

labour, seen by management theorists and practitioners to be a necessary pre-condition of goal-directed behaviour and profitable production (Burrell, 1988).

*Emergent themes of misbehaviour*

The misbehaviour discussed in this sub-section reflects the emergent literature and the detailed ideas of recent theoretical accounts from both industrial sociology and organisational behaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Vardi and Weitz, 2004; Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005; Kidwell and Martin, 2005; Spicer and Bohm, 2007). Many of the emergent themes are by no means new organisational phenomena. Indeed, some dimensions are currently benefiting from a resurgence of interest, some are new directions to the core themes discussed in the previous sub-section, and one dimension has certain characteristics that suggests a very new way by which employee misbehaviour can manifest. It is put forward that emergent themes in the field are humour, management misbehaviour, internet misbehaviour, identity misbehaviour, misbehaviour that benefits the organisation, and informal survival strategies.

*Humour and misbehaviour.* There is evidence to suggest a great deal of continuity when it comes to studying joking in organisations (Bradney, 1957; Sykes, 1966). However, in recent years, humour as a form of resistance, has commanded a high degree of attention (Collinson, 1988, Griffiths, 1998; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Taylor and Bain, 2003; Marra, 2007). What is more, the field of organisational behaviour has begun to take an interest in humour, in terms of subordinates moderating the style of leaders (Avolio *et al.*, 1999; Duncan and Feisal, 1989). Essentially, it is believed that humour, as a form of resistance, may relate to the recent remission of more traditional forms of misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Knights and McCabe, 2000; Spicer and Bohm, 2007). However, interest in humour is not restricted to being an alternative form of subverting figures of authority. For instance, emergent research identifies humour as a means by which unfair gender relations can be kept intact (Holmes, 2000, 2006), the ambiguity of joking allows job candidates to make contentious statements to interviewers without fear of recrimination (Grugulis, 2002), and, humour is disproportionately used between “equals” to create social distance and emphasise social boundaries, during formal staff meetings (Holmes and Marra, 2002). Humour can clearly take the form of employee resistance or wider forms of contention, yet it is equally important to acknowledge how humour can also be used to preserve unfair organisational hierarchies.

*Management misbehaviour.* It has been noted that to understand misbehaviour in the first place, we must understand the role of management in misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Indeed, for the most part, management defines misbehaviour, management is complicit with some forms of misbehaviour, and managers misbehave too. It is the latter that has aroused the most attention in recent years. For instance, LaNuez and Jermier (1994) believe major societal and organisational forces have eroded the many traditional privileges of managers and technocrats, resulting in a willingness to engage in forms of deep opposition. Further, studies by Miethe (1999) found that it was the “seasoned” or “veteran” employee – someone who is more likely to be a manager or supervisor and therefore witnessed a wider variety of misconduct – who is most likely to “blow the whistle” on corporate malpractice of other scandalous events. Moreover, Collinson (2000), for example, believes managers are increasingly drawn to exploiting the oppressive qualities of humour.



However, it is in the field of organisational behaviour where increasing attention is given to management misbehaviour. For example, managers are prone, like ordinary employees, to covering up unethical behaviour they have observed (Stashevsky and Weisberg, 2003). A key reason for managers not to disclose unethical behaviour is related to feelings of pressure, fear and threats of the consequences. As such, recent interest in management misbehaviour is largely the result of managers working in increasingly pressurised working environments and resorting to strategies that deviate from the official script. In this sense managers are resisting pressure put upon them by more senior members of the organisation and is something that is likely to be of broad interest to today's scholars and practitioners.

*Internet and peer-related misbehaviour.* Recent reviews of misbehaviour point to the importance of the internet as a tool of choice for mounting campaigns against employers (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005). However, the field of industrial sociology seems to be slow in taking up the challenge of researching employee use of the internet. Where it does arise in this field, it tends to recount internet activity that runs in parallel with informal or unofficial trade union activity (Pliskin *et al.*, 1997; Carter *et al.*, 2003; Saundry *et al.*, 2007). However, the most recent research appears drawn to new developments in internet technology and the arrival of Web 2.0 communication technology, or the "social web". For instance, Richards's (2007b) observations of internet activity reports on how non-organised workers are progressively making use of such technology to take action against employers, and, as a mean to misbehave and survive work. Examples include weblogs, wikis, social networking platforms and virtual reality worlds being used for sharing experiences of work and creating profession and friend-based networks where they did not exist before. Further examples include peer-to-peer sharing of short video clips based on defiant acts filmed on work time, and distributed through social media websites, such as YouTube.com, or via email or mobile telephones. Similar work, specifically based on an emerging genre of weblogs – of a work-related theme – discuss a new and anonymous medium for workers to parody work and develop peer-to-peer networks that surround the provision of critical accounts of work (Richards, 2007a; Schoneboom, 2007). Peer-based activities conducted through new forms of communication represent a trend that ties in well with Spicer and Bohm's (2007) view of misbehaviour.

In contrast, theorists from the field of organisational behaviour have produced narrow, yet a plethora of studies that focus on the highly topical and newsworthy issue of employee misuse of company information technology, on work time. Examples include studies that surround cyberslacking (Block, 2001), internet addiction at work (Beard, 2002), cyberloafing (Lim, 2002), internet abuse (Griffiths, 2003), personal Web usage in the workplace (Mahatanankoon *et al.*, 2004), and internet misuse (Lara *et al.*, 2006). The sub-field of internet misbehaviour may vary, yet it is reasonably clear to see how such actions are a form of micro-resistance or sabotage. The social study of the internet is in its infancy (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002) and where it does exist some say it quickly becomes obsolete (Cavanagh, 2007), therefore internet misbehaviour represents a very new and ongoing challenge for the contemporary scholar or practitioner.

*Identity misbehaviour.* As previously indicated, misbehaviour is believed to exist increasingly outside identity formation associated with professional movements, such as trade unions, staff associations or other professional associations (Ackroyd and



Thompson, 1999; Thompson and Newsome, 2004; Spicer and Bohm, 2007). Instead, informal self-organisation (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) typically occurs around friendship or kinship groups, which may or may not represent sub-groups of professional organisation (Spicer and Bohm, 2007). What is more, what defines the sub-group need not necessarily relate to shared opposition to management objectives. For instance, Wallace and Leicht (2004) call for more research to be directed towards conflicting societal values, which form the basis for identity formation, such as notions of social equality, social freedom, multiculturalism, and gender equity, which commonly spillover into the organisation, resulting in “culture wars in the workplace”. Recent waves of both legal and illegal migration to the UK, from the newly expanded EU and beyond, are certain to have led to a range of cultural misbehaviour in the workplace. However, specific discussions of identity misbehaviour and micro-resistance appear to follow research that relates to the emerging organisational paradigm of social identity theory (Haslam, 2004). For instance, from doctors opposition to taking on a management role (Hallier and Forbes, 2005), to small friendship groups forming the basis of shop floor resistance in restaurants (Richards and Marks, 2007). Such misbehaviour represents a problem for management, for two reasons: employees often seek to protect self-defined identities, which may differ from the formal line, and limited resources aimed at fostering a corporate identity at the expense of identities associated with formally recognised employee associations, make it almost impossible to keep track of any number of potentially troublesome sub-groups and cliques.

The field of organisational behaviour seems more averse to considering identity misbehaviour, due to the excessive emphasis on employee compliance, or lack of compliance, to a rather problematic notion of corporate identity. As such, employee identity seems to represent a very new and distinct avenue by which micro-resistance and sabotage can be explored and understood. However, such misbehaviour also has parallels with gender and sexual misbehaviour, in that gender and sexuality are related to the broader identity of employees.

*Functional misbehaviour.* What is meant by “functional” concerns misbehaviour that deviates from the official script, yet leads to positive outcomes for the employer organisation. Such misbehaviour is a rare feature of industrial sociology and where it is explored, it is often studied indirectly, such as the containment of employee-employer hostilities, through informal reward or working practices (Gouldner, 1954; Ditton, 1977; Mars, 1994; Webb and Palmer, 1998).

Instead, it is in the field of organisational behaviour where there is a newly found appetite for understanding functional misbehaviour. For instance, key theorists, Vardi and Weitz (2004, pp. 33-34), make extensive reference to what they call “Type O” misbehaviour, or “misbehaviours that primarily intend to benefit the member’s employing organisation as a whole”. An example given of such activity includes an employee who falsifies records to improve the chances of obtaining a contract for the organisation. Similarly, Galperin (2003) believes deviance may not always be harmful to the organisation. Moreover, Kidwell and Martin (2005, p. 11) state how “whistleblowing, innovation, organisational dissent, and resistance to conformity are potentially forms of what can be called positive or constructive deviance”. Despite the fact that industrial sociologists tend not to study functional dimensions of organisation, however, this may actually occur, it seems reasonable to suggest such actions represent an “acceptable” face of resistance and sabotage. As such, it appears, for management theorists, that

actions of this kind are arousing a degree of interest because they lead to positive outcomes for the organisation. Functional misbehaviour is by no means a new phenomenon, yet it represents a new conceptual development worthy of further and immediate investigations.

*Informal survival strategies.* According to Noon and Blyton (2007), workers need survival and coping strategies to get through the working day and survive the boredom, tedium, monotony, drudgery and powerlessness that characterises many jobs. Further, to be able to survive or cope with work, people are obliged to become resourceful and creative in developing strategies that allow them some sort of control, and construct meaning for the activities that management direct them to undertake. However, the nature of the labour process is changing and continues to change, as Collinson and Ackroyd (2005, p. 322) note:

[...] [with] more extensive forms of technological and behavioural monitoring within organisations, employees may well need to find new coping strategies and new ways of “misbehaving” and resisting these disciplinary regimes.

In more literal terms, this involves what Delbridge (1998) refers to as maintaining a private realm at work, making small adjustments to the official rules, and creating time and space by finding more effective ways of beating regulated routines. Further research points towards strategies, such as holding on to known and secure routines, cultivating comradeship, cherry-picking the good bits of the new initiatives, and holding on to tacit skills (Storey and Harrison, 1999). It seems, for industrial sociologists, coping with work largely equates with the social and self-organisation of survival – a situation heightened by the decline of organised labour, and therefore representing a dimension to misbehaviour that will continue to require more study for the near and perhaps distant future.

In the field of organisational behaviour, survival takes on quite a different meaning and tends to emphasise far more individualistic and less creative methods of coping with work. Indeed, according to organisational behaviour theorists, how employees cope at work departs somewhat from the assumption of a creative and honourable worker depicted in the competing field of industrial sociology. As observed by early organisational studies, employees can also daydream or make use of drugs to help get through a day at work (Mangione and Quinn, 1975), both of which are highly individualistic pursuits. More contemporary studies, for instance, discuss a range of substance abuse (Schmidt *et al.*, 1997; Bacharach *et al.*, 2002), which includes excessive use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs on work time. Generally, it is believed substance abuse on work time relates to lax supervision or extended job autonomy, lack of challenge from the job, and, the social availability and normalisation of drug and alcohol misuse (Vardi and Weitz, 2004). Whichever way such misbehaviour manifests, surviving and coping with work appears to reflect a dystopian version of micro-resistance and sabotage, and likely to need further attention in an age where it could be getting more difficult to publicly display discontent (Spicer and Bohm, 2007).

### **Problems with the extant literature and a guide to future research**

Broadly, the main incentive to review and support further research in the area of misbehaviour is best articulated in the words of Thompson and Ackroyd (1995, p. 629). In brief, researchers, whichever background they come from, must resist “taking labour out”

of organisational research and find some way to “put labour back in, by doing theory and research in such a way that it is possible to ‘see’ resistance and misbehaviour”. Such sentiments are also echoed in the field of organisational behaviour (Vardi and Weitz, 2004; Kidwell and Martin, 2005). However, doing more theory and research is dependent upon knowing what problems exist with the extant literature. Such problems will now be re-visited along with other problems that underlie the broad and emergent field of misbehaviour. Problems that are discussed include the many ways misbehaviour can and is defined, where the parameters for the study of misbehaviour should lie, and, how we should research misbehaviour in the future.

*Definitions and what to do with incongruous paradigms*

Probably, the most problematic feature associated with researching and theorising misbehaviour is: how should we define actions that vary so much, are interpreted in so many ways, and attributed to so many root causes? For instance, misbehaviour is typically viewed as either dysfunctional employee attitudes towards the organisation (Sagie *et al.*, 2003), or a form of infra-politics, or “less formalised and organised attempts to challenge managerial hegemony” (Spicer and Bohm, 2007, p. 1675). Even then, it is debatable whether such acts should really be viewed as survival strategies (Noon and Blyton, 2007). Industrial relations theorists probably concur in large part with industrial sociologists; however, in the field of gender studies, misbehaviour is seen to be synonymous with both conflict and sexual conviviality between men and women. Moreover, it is believed that broader socio-political conflicts, related to multiculturalism and political allegiance, also spillover into the workplace and represent a further distinct take on misbehaviour (Wallace and Leicht, 2004). Misbehaviour, therefore, is associated with incongruous acts that arise from individual objectives that clash with the organisation’s formal objectives, class or asymmetrical employment relations, unequal gender opportunities, and any number of ways in which non-organisational identities can become salient on work time.

However, is it possible to come to one definition or conceptualisation of misbehaviour? There is no simple answer to this conundrum, yet all acts do have one thing in common and it is this commonality that makes for a good starting point – misbehaviour would not occur without work organisations. Indeed, as Thompson and McHugh (2002, p. 6) note:

Work organisations remain a crucial meeting place of contending social forces – owners, managers, professions, and workers – which generate and reflect contradiction and change. It is also the case that it is the profit-seeking nature of business organisations that creates their distinctive forms of management, control or other social relations.

As such, the divisive nature of profit-seeking, and the many forces at work in organisations plus several more discussed throughout this paper, leads to the creation of many things beyond what is formally expected of organizations. In effect, and depending on how you look at it, misbehaviour represents “just” or expected reactions to the contradictory pressures put on employees in organizations, and for others, it equates with wasted time and energies that should be managed into something more productive or efficient. Therefore, while on the one hand, it seems unlikely that organisations can function without misbehaviour, on the other hand, the really hard questions for managers seem to concern how much misbehaviour is reasonable, and what types of misbehaviour are acceptable. In contrast, those who are more critical of management may want to know

which forms of misbehaviour are more effective and which are not. Consequently, it is inaccurate and misleading to label misbehaviour as something that should not happen or is dysfunctional in some way. By defining and conceptualising misbehaviour as one of the many outcomes of organisational activity, it may just create the conditions for a more objective and unified understanding of this neglected field of interest.

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*Where do the research parameters of misbehaviour lie?*

Misbehaviour is widely portrayed as being a phenomenon that is exclusive to the actual organisation (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Vardi and Weitz, 2004). Indeed, it is only in recent times that theorists put forward the view that misbehaviour is a phenomenon that spills out of organisations (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005; Spicer and Bohm, 2007). Evidence for external misbehaviour, such as unauthorised absenteeism, is implicit in many texts (Edwards and Scullion, 1982), yet it is a part of misbehaviour that is easier to contemplate when referring to the most recent research on misbehaviour. That is, research that considers defiant acts that are readily pursued through global mediums, such as the internet, cyberspace and other forms of mobile, wireless technology (Schoneboom, 2007; Richards, 2007a, b).

Moreover, further examples where the parameters lie in terms of what constitutes misbehaviour has been challenged throughout this paper. For instance, misbehaviour can also result from forces that spill in from broader society (Gutek, 1989; Wallace and Leicht, 2004), managers misbehave in all manner of ways (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), misbehaviour can represent a functional side of organisational practices (Galperin, 2003; Vardi and Weitz, 2004; Kidwell and Martin, 2005), and, misbehaviour can exist in the invisible psychology (Noon and Blyton, 2007) and the bloodstream of employees (Mangione and Quinn, 1975). As such, it is becoming more evident that future researchers of misbehaviour must seriously question where the boundaries lie in researching this phenomenon. For certain, misbehaviour should not be researched or theorised as a phenomenon that only occurs in the physical locality that is broadly referred to as the work organisation. Neither should employee misbehaviour be studied using the strict and problematic notions of corporate, professional or any other formal identity. In other words, the challenge goes beyond putting labour back into organisational study and instead should increasingly include putting people and their wider affiliations and interests in there too. This suggestion may conflict with the typically conventional nature of organisational study, yet is put forward that there is no longer any good reason to neglect misbehaviour that manifests outwith the organisation or separate to professional association, nor is there good reason to neglect broader societal forces that have the capacity to shape internal misbehaviour. A final dilemma relates to the real prospects of misbehaviour proliferating in Cyberspace, for example, via the increasing widespread use of workplace or home computers, or any range of personal and portable communication devices. In short, it is proposed that the parameters to researching misbehaviour must be a matter that is seriously contemplated before embarking on theoretical and empirical investigations, and in turn, form the main basis by which new and old research can be assessed.

*Ways of putting labour and people back into organisational study*

It is widely noted in the current crop of literature that a range of methodological problems can be associated with researching misbehaviour. Examples include the call

for new and innovative research methods to match innovative employee practices and informal organisation (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995). Further, many researchers are believed to have a “trained incapacity” to see misbehaviour, or that the contemporary organisational researcher just does not have the access, time and resources to research hidden dimensions of organisations (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Theorists from the field of organisational behaviour express similar sentiments, although the main methodological dilemmas seem to relate to how misbehaviour is commonly researched:

Any attempt to question the participants or ask them to describe and explain their motives by means of common research methods, such as questionnaires and structured interviews, will actually call for less than honest replies (Vardi and Weitz, 2004, p. 232).

However, it seems unreasonable to imply that one of the main problems with researching misbehaviour concerns employees wishing to either protect their own deviant and perhaps selfish practices, or, employees will want to refrain from honesty to protect the interests of senior management. Instead, it could be the manner by which organisational theorists portray misbehaviour –, e.g. deviant, dysfunctional, harmful, damaging – that forms the main underlying reason why employers and employees are unwilling to participate in such research projects. If the researcher discusses misbehaviour with the organizational gatekeeper and research subject in broader and less provocative terms, and acknowledging the realities of why employees may misbehave, we may witness different attitudes and outcomes to such studies.

If this turned out to be true then researchers from all backgrounds would be able to continue using traditional and practical research methods. In reality, what is more of an urgency is some degree of return to a mixed method approach to exploring misbehaviour, and particularly including the use of qualitative case studies, ethnography and participant observation. For if not, the theoretical strides made through a long history of such studies (Roy, 1952; Ditton, 1977; Burawoy, 1979; Pollert, 1981; Analoui and Kakabadse, 1989; Graham, 1995; Palmer, 1996; Vallas, 2003; Townsend, 2005), are unlikely to be repeated in the future. Indeed, without close observations of misbehaviour itself, we are unlikely to tap into its richness or variety, nor gain a deeper appreciation of the meaning and motives behind such acts. The same may be said for new and innovative forms of misbehaviour, which appear to be increasingly characterised by their external manifestation. There also appears to be an urgent need to adapt all traditional research methods associated with the social sciences to account for cultural formations and peer-to-peer networks that are currently emerging in virtual worlds (Hine, 2000). As such, future research on misbehaviour must reflect the breadth of methods available and be adaptable to wherever the misbehaviour takes place.

### Summary and conclusions

The recent interest in misbehaviour from the field of industrial sociology (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005; Spicer and Bohm, 2007) and the field of organisational behaviour (Robinson and Bennett, 1995; Vardi and Wiener, 1996; Sagie *et al.*, 2003; Vardi and Weitz, 2004; Kidwell and Martin, 2005) highlights how important it is to have a broad understanding of misbehaviour. Such understandings are all the more relevant when we examine the recent interest in misbehaviour – mainly related to disputing claims

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about tighter management control of the labour process, what happens to employee grievance and discontent when organised labour is excluded or marginalised in the organisation (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), and managers continuing to struggle to maintain sufficient order and compliance across the workforce (Vardi and Weitz, 2004). Further, and no lesser reason to re-visit misbehaviour, includes the continuation of women being unfairly undermined by men in the workplace (Cockburn, 1991), and a range of political and culture-based conflict spilling over into work time (Wallace and Leicht, 2004).

Despite commanding a long history of interest, this is an area of organisational study in its infancy. In particular, there are clear problems with the emergent body of knowledge as it has developed separately, as sub-disciplines, of wider, yet largely incongruous, scholarly fields. The basis of the paper, therefore, concerns the potential for assimilating theory and insights from four fields of interest. To recap, the paper began by claiming that misbehaviour has a range of pervasive core features, yet continues to develop as a phenomenon, due to a range of conventional and contemporary internal organisational and broader external forces. Moreover, much of what is currently known about misbehaviour has emerged separately across a range of disciplines and therefore there is genuine purpose and value in attempting to reconcile such diverging insights. Consequently, the main reasons to re-visit and re-review extant literature is to map misbehaviour for the benefit of assessing current understandings and for guiding future study.

The unification process began by considering how misbehaviour is defined, its varying and incongruous character, and why it is only in the past decade or so that researchers are taking this phenomenon more seriously. Discussions confirmed that defining and conceptualising misbehaviour is a problematic issue, but such problems can be surmounted. Further problems emerged in that no one field covered the rich character of misbehaviour and that the reasons for recent scholarly interest in misbehaviour varied across the disciplines too. Secondly, attempts were made to identify core features and emergent features of misbehaviour – a process designed so researchers can readily navigate such a varied field of study. The main advantages of the new map, compared to previous articulations (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Vardi and Weitz, 2004), is that it gives greater consideration to the biases and omissions from competing fields of interest, it demonstrates how age-old forms of misbehaviour continue to exist in modern organisations and some forms, particularly employee defiance, have evolved into new forms to reflect new resources available to employees and the concerted attempts by management to control the labour process. The map also helps to clearly articulate new opportunities for research and theoretical integration. Thirdly, theoretical, methodological and practical problems with the body of literature on misbehaviour were identified and further discussed. Findings from the final section suggests there may be advantages in viewing misbehaviour as something that does and will happen, as opposed to something that should not happen, or giving the impression that it can be managed out of organisations. Additionally, the findings recommend that future researchers should broaden the parameters by which misbehaviour is researched. A third finding makes recommendations on how to make better use of traditional research methods, as well as encouraging the adaptation of such methods to consider the newest locality for misbehaviour – i.e. the internet and cyberspace.



The contribution of this paper, therefore, includes the following. First, the review exercise is unique in that it draws, more proportionally than previous articulations, on a rich body of literature from four fields of interest. By taking such an approach it provides all parties who are interested in misbehaviour a chance to digest and be wary of the many perspectives on misbehaviour and the many reasons why misbehaviour has aroused new scholarly interest. Second, despite being less precise in terms of displaying an array of acts, as is the case of Ackroyd and Thompson's (1999) map, and being less exact in identifying motivating factors behind misbehaviour, as is the case with Vardi and Wiener's (1996) typology, the new map contributes to our understandings of misbehaviour by covering core and emergent features of misbehaviour. Such an approach also helps demonstrate the dynamic and pervasive nature of misbehaviour. Moreover, the map acts as a tool for researchers who may wish to further investigate misbehaviour. The discussions that surrounded the mapping exercise pointed towards a rich and varied research agenda that is reflective of the nature of contemporary organisations, the nature of the modern workforce, the nature of new technology, and the unconventional social frameworks that misbehaviour manifests around. A third contribution is advisory in that future researchers of misbehaviour are likely to require guidance on researching such a contentious and complex phenomenon, which rarely occurs in an open fashion or unfolds in a straightforward manner. As such, the contribution should be viewed as having both theoretical and practical applications.

However, the findings also suggest the work on misbehaviour is far from complete and it is proposed that a rich range of theoretical and conceptual challenges lie ahead for this emergent field of interest. For instance, the main theoretical frameworks of industrial sociology – labour process theory, and organisational behaviour – organisational psychology, can only offer limited insights into a modern world where a great deal of employee misbehaviour is more and more associated with the problematic notion of sub-group allegiances and identities. It seems, therefore, more attention needs to be directed towards researching and conceptualising misbehaviour in relation to a complex mix of friendship, peer and kinship groups, rather than the conventional emphasis on formal occupational and professional modes of organisation and opposition (Spicer and Bohm, 2007). If this view is correct then it also questions how useful it is to conceptualise misbehaviour as starting at the point where employees deviate from formal or official corporate identities. Furthermore, there is a range of methodological difficulties associated with researching misbehaviour, in that there seems to be a shortage of willing organisations and sufficient research participants to help advance of knowledge of the unconventional side of organizations. Research methodologies must also increasingly reflect the location of misbehaviour, which may be found in the boardroom, the shop floor, the canteen, the home, or even in cyberspace. More generally, urgent research is required in terms of further conceptualising humour as a mode of communicating serious organisational messages, finding out why managers subvert the very rules they are employed to uphold, how employees survive work regimes that give little room for respite, and, attempts must be made to research and further conceptualise misbehaviour that benefits the organisation (Vardi and Wiener, 1996). Furthermore, opportunities continue to exist in terms of updating work on fiddles (Ditton, 1977; Mars, 1994), sexual misconduct (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Quinn, 1977) and the hidden subversion of the female gender in organizations (Gutek, 1989; Cockburn, 1991), to reflect contemporary organizations, contemporary employees and contemporary

socio-cultural forces. It is hoped that there are other scholars out there who wish to take up the challenges identified in this paper, or have identified other challenges associated with developing our understandings of misbehaviour.

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